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USAID Helps Avalanche Victims



Photo: Mercy Corps

In February 2006, Mercy Corps delivered food donated by USAID to five families suffering from the tragic loss of family members and severe damage to their homes in Jirgital, Tajikistan.

During the night of January 31, 2006, snow avalanches struck several villages in the mountainous district of Jirgital, Tajikistan. Initial reports stated that 18 people had died, seven were hospitalized, and ten homes were destroyed. The Tajik Ministry of Emergency Situations and the World Food Program advised that they had sent trucks from Dushanbe with food and other emergency supplies, but that it would likely take several days for them to reach Jirgital.

Two Mercy Corps pick-up trucks carrying wheat flour and vegetable oil donated by USAID left in an NGO convoy as soon as it became clear that no immediate help was getting through to the affected area. The food came from the stock of the USAID-funded Development Assistance Program, which works in the Rasht Valley to overcome food insecurity through agriculture, food distribution, and health programming. The convoy was the first outside assistance to reach the avalanche affected village.

Together with the District Chairman and Minister of Emergency Situations, Mr. Mirzo Ziyoev, and village leaders, Mercy Corps identified the families worst affected by the avalanches, each of whom had suffered the loss of two to six family members, and distributed 1,400 kg of wheat flour (28 bags) and 144 liters of vegetable oil.

The speed of the USAID food delivery was important to these families who had lost their homes and family members. Mr. Hojiev Sharif, who lost three of his children in the avalanche, said, "To lose my children, as well as to have my house destroyed, is a tragedy I never imagined would happen. I am grateful for the food we received. It will help as we try to put our lives back together."